

Data on individual children was gathered in years 1 (next-to-last year in preschool), 2 (last year in preschool), 3 (kindergarten), and 5 (second grade). The average age of children each year was 4.3, 5.1, 6.0, and 8.0 years old respectively at the time of the child assessments. The initial sample was approximately evenly divided by gender (51% boys), and about 30% were children of color. A total of 826 children were initially recruited for the study from four states (CA, CO, CT, and NC). Because of attrition, as expected in a longitudinal study of the scope of our project, the number of families in the study decreased somewhat each year. The sample consisted of 826 children in year 1, 579 in year 2, 451 in year 3, 463 in year 4, and 418 in year 5. These 418 children participating in year 5 represented 160 of the original 183 classes.

Most of the attrition from year 1 to year 2 was planned by design. Only children who participated in the study in year one and who stayed in the same child care center for the second year of data collection were invited to remain in the sample. This selection procedure maximized the retention of children in year 2 who had relatively stable child care situations.

The study also experienced attrition due to family mobility. We did not have the resources to follow families when they moved out of their states of origin, although we have continued to make every attempt to keep in contact with all families through mailings to parents. As shown in Table 1.1, we examined whether families who remained in the study differed from families who left the study. While there is still variation in the demographic characteristics of the sample over time, there tended to be greater attrition among children of color and among less educated and poorer families. In the first year, 30% of the sample was children of color, while by the second grade, this percentage was 21%. Table 1.1 also reports the maternal education and income data that were collected in year 1. The increase in these averages over time suggests that there was somewhat greater attrition among families from lower SES backgrounds. In contrast, the distribution by gender remained fairly constant over time.

The sample sizes reported in particular analyses of the CQO data fluctuate slightly depending on which measures are used in the analyses. As described above, 826 children were recruited for the study. From year 1, we have complete child assessments, classroom observations, teacher surveys, and parent surveys on 745 children from 169 classrooms. Because the analyses reported in this study are based on a bioecological model of development, which considers the multiple influences of child characteristics, family factors, and classroom environment on development, we describe these 745 children as the core sample.

Procedures

Five sources of data were gathered to examine the relation between child care quality and children's outcomes: (a) classroom observations, (b) teacher reports of beliefs and practices, (c) individual child assessments, (d) teacher ratings of children, and (e) parent reports of child and family characteristics. Complete data were gathered in years 1, 2, 3, and 5 (the last two years of child care, kindergarten, and second grade); only teacher reports of practices and parent surveys were gathered in year 4 (first grade).

In years 1, 2, 3, and 5, classroom observations were conducted to gather information about the quality of practices. During the first year, a 3-4 hour classroom observation was conducted in each classroom to gather information on child care quality. In subsequent years (2, 3, and 5) classroom quality and practices were measured with brief observations conducted at the time of the child assessments. To gather information about the quality of teacher-child relationships, in years 1, 2, 3, and 5 teachers completed ratings of the closeness of their relationship with each child. In addition, teachers completed various measures of practices and beliefs each year.